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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 08 DUSHANBE 001156

NOFORN
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STATE DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: PREL EAID ECON MASS PGOV PHUM TI

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS

CLASSIFIED BY: KENNETH E GROSS, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Dushanbe welcomes the upcoming visit of General

Petraeus, and provides the following overview of recent developments and key issues in Tajikistan. Since your last meeting with President Rahmon on January 17, Rahmon met with Assistant Secretary of State Boucher in April and Assistant Secretary of State Blake in July in Dushanbe. He also met with Special Representative Holbrooke and Secretary Clinton at the United Nations General Assembly in September.

KEY GOALS FOR YOUR VISIT

Rahmon will be most interested to hear of U.S. plans for Afghanistan and will press you for greater benefits for Tajikistan in return for its cooperation and support on Afghanistan. The Tajiks believe Uzbekistan is trying to keep all NDN related business for itself; they want more traffic to transit Tajikistan, more infrastructure to be built to support that traffic, and the United States to purchase Tajik bottled water and farm produce for forces in Afghanistan.

¶2. (C) The mission's key goals for your visit are to:

-- Help you to solidify your relationship with President Rahmon and his security officials.

-- Reiterate our appreciation for support with overflight access. It greatly assists our efforts in Afghanistan.

-- Secure Rahmon's agreement to accept transit of lethal materials to Afghanistan through Tajikistan.

-- Press Rahmon for further economic and political reforms in the run-up to the February 2010 parliamentary elections.

INTERNAL RIVALS, MILITANT GROUPS, AND SUMMITRY

¶ 13. (C) The Tajik civil war ended with a power sharing arrangement between Rahmon's government and the leaders of various elements of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). Since then, Rahmon gradually has reneged on this deal and forced oppositionists out of government into prison, out of the country, or they have died mysteriously. In May 2009 an armed group led by a former UTO figure, Mullah Abdullo Rahimov, returned to Tajikistan from Afghanistan, reportedly with several foreign fighters. Tajik security forces eventually neutralized this group without outside assistance. In doing this, the preeminent former opposition figure (and former minister in the postwar government) Mirzo Ziyoev was killed. The government claims militants killed Ziyoev when he tried to persuade them to surrender to the government, but there is evidence government forces murdered him. This leaves only one former opposition leader still in the government.

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¶ 16. (C) Russian-Tajik relations have deteriorated over the past several years. The two governments could not agree on the terms of Russian involvement in Tajikistan's preeminent unfinished infrastructure project, the Rogun Dam, and they have a variety of other differences, some minor and some major. In October President Rahmon approved legislation downgrading the status of the Russian language in Tajikistan. His government is now in discussions with Russia on the possible payment of rent by Russia for its military bases in Tajikistan. Many Tajiks believe the Russians in some way supported Mullah Abdullo's group in order to send a menacing signal to Tajikistan. President Rahmon will have just returned from a state visit to Moscow when you see him.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin was in Dushanbe on October 16 and met with Ambassador to ask whether the United States was placing military forces on the Tajik border with Afghanistan. Ambassador assured Karasin this was not true, but the episode shows the Russians are worried about their military relationship with Tajikistan, which they consider a vital Russian security interest, and will give credence to Tajik threats to seek other security partners.

SECURITY COOPERATION

¶ 17. (C) Security cooperation remains a strong point in our relationship with Tajikistan. The Ministry of Defense volunteered this year for the first time to host CENTCOM's

Exercise Regional Cooperation, which concluded 10 August. Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan participated in the disaster response exercise. CENTCOM and the Tajik Armed Forces held Consultative Staff Talks in May and established the FY 2010 Security Cooperation Plan. The plan reflects Tajikistan's increased interest in demining and participation in the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). The U.S. Army Humanitarian Demining Research and Development Office will provide Tajikistan a mechanical demining machine for field evaluation in FY10 with a planned FMF purchase in FY11. Tajikistan reconfirmed its commitment to deploy a company sized peacekeeping unit in 2011 with GPOI support. CENTCOM sponsored development of Tajikistan's National Peacekeeping Policy White Paper in August, which is now being staffed through the Tajik interagency process for Presidential approval. Tajikistan is scheduled to begin staff and unit training in the 2nd and 3rd QTRs FY10. Letters of Request for \$2.5 million for this training have been approved and are now in the Letter of Offer and Acceptance development stage. However, the Office of Defense Cooperation is concerned with reluctance on the Tajik MoD's part to facilitate regular engagement with the unit designated for Peacekeeping Operations.

¶8. (C) CENTCOM Counter Narcotics: CENTCOM's Counter Narcotics program is making strong contributions to Tajikistan's security.

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Your last visit helped expand CN's engagement by establishing a permanent DoD contracting officer in Bishkek to support the Central Asian States. This year, \$16.9M in funding recently approved in the Supplemental Bill will support construction of an interagency National Training Center, infrastructure at the Nizhny Pyanj Point of Entry, and communications equipment. The Training Center will be a multi-use facility by all Ministries and serve as a venue for SOCCENT's bi-annual Counter Narco-Terrorism training. A recent end-use monitoring visit demonstrated the Tajiks are using previously provided communications equipment and maintaining the equipment. There is room to grow this program. This year, we will begin establishing an interagency communications architecture at Nizhny Pyanj and the adjoining district. This will allow five government agencies to communicate using a compatible system.

¶9. (C) Nizhny Pyanj Bridge: The NP bridge and Point of Entry

facilities have improved the lines of communication between Tajikistan and Afghanistan significantly. It is true the bridge is not being used to its fullest capacity; however, in contrast to the old ferry system, the current traffic is much higher and continues to increase. Counts vary between 40 and 200 containers and transport trucks per day. Pedestrians use the bridge but must be shuttled across. The bridge typically is open from 0800 to 1700 six days a week. CENTCOM funding in 2010 at this facility will improve force protection with lighting, fences, and cameras, and additional parking areas. President Rahmon probably will pitch to you the need for construction of another bridge across the Pyanj River - our normal response is that we want to see the bridge being used to full capacity before considering any other bridge construction projects.

AF-PAK STRATEGY

¶10. (S/NF) Since the USCENTCOM conference in Washington D.C., where the Obama Administration's AF-PAK strategy was explained to the military representatives of Central and South Asia, there have been several incidents along the border of Tajikistan with ISAF forces. There have been two alleged overflights of the border by ISAF aircraft and several ground operations observed by the Tajik Border Guards. The last incident involved two ISAF helicopters crossing the border near Kala-i-Khumb on June 9. The Minister of Defense was in the area in response to the

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situation in Tavildara and personally witnessed the helicopters. To date, there has been no response from CENTCOM, ISAF, or RC North authorities to Tajikistan's request for an explanation of the incident. This subject may not be brought up, but a response should be prepared in the event it is.

¶11. (C) Tajikistan is eager to see the United States make greater use of our agreement on transit of non-lethal goods to Afghanistan and hopes for economic benefits to Tajikistan from this agreement. So far only about 30 cargo containers have transited Tajikistan by road from Manas. No rail cargo has transited Tajikistan since it must pass through Uzbekistan. The Tajiks have pressed many times for U.S. purchase of bottled water, juices, and fruits and vegetables from Tajik suppliers. The Tajiks are looking for any way possible to circumvent Uzbekistan's stranglehold on their foreign trade, and they believe it is Uzbekistan's policy to exclude Tajikistan from NDN-related business.

COUNTER NARCOTIC EFFORTS

¶12. (C) Narcotics trafficking and related corruption problems are extremely serious in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is a major transit corridor for Southwest Asian heroin to Russia and Europe. About half of heroin seizures in Central Asia occur in Tajikistan. Capabilities of Tajik law enforcement agencies are severely limited by lack of resources and widespread corruption. Law enforcement agencies are reluctant to target well-known and well-connected traffickers; however, they do show a willingness to target low and mid-level traffickers, particularly those of foreign nationality

¶13. (C) Multiple agencies in Tajikistan are involved in the fight against drug trafficking: the Drug Control Agency, Ministry of Interior, the State Committee for National Security, and the Border Guards under the State Committee for National Security. Tajik Border Guards are poorly trained, poorly paid, and under-equipped. It is common to observe border personnel without shoes and in short supply of food. A main thrust of U.S. assistance is border security. Assistance provides equipment, training, and infrastructure, such as building and refurbishing border posts, border-crossing checkpoints, and new training facilities for the Border Guards. The Embassy also assists other law enforcement agencies. The Drug Control Agency is a ten-year old, 360 officer agency developed through a United Nations Office of

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Drugs and Crime project that is funded primarily by the Department of State.

ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES

¶14. (U) Tajikistan's economy continues to suffer from the global recession through major drops in exports, imports, and remittances from Tajiks working abroad. Tajik exports have fallen by half this year, largely due to decreased demand for Tajikistan's two key exports, aluminum and

cotton. Imports have fallen along with remittances. Because Tajikistan's budget depends heavily on customs revenue, both declines have had an impact on state spending.

¶15. (U) The most important economic lifeline for average Tajiks are the remittances from an estimated million compatriots working abroad,

mainly in Russia. The money they sent home equaled over 50% of GDP last year and literally keeps rural communities alive. Due to the economic crisis remittances have fallen over 35% this year. Besides reducing imports, the drop in remittances is reducing food security, especially in the countryside.

ELECTIONS ARE COMING, BUT DEMOCRACY ISN'T

¶16. (C) The government has limited the ability of opposition political parties to operate and made no progress on electoral reforms for the February 2010 parliamentary elections.

Parliamentary opposition is weak - only 15 of the 62 members of parliament are not members of the ruling party, and most of these are independent in name only. Parliament acts as a rubber stamp, barely discussing important legislation such as the national budget. It recently passed a restrictive new law on religion, curbing the activities of religious groups, Islamic or otherwise. Our advice that this will only serve to radicalize many believers has fallen on deaf ears. The President appointed a human rights Ombudsman recently, but the office is not independent of him, nor does it have resources. The Ombudsman has asked donors to finance his operations.

CORRUPTION CLOUDS RELATIONS WITH DONORS

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¶17. (C) In late 2007, Tajikistan's National Bank admitted it had hidden hundreds of millions of dollars in loans and guarantees to cotton investors, violating its IMF debt relief program. The IMF demanded early repayment of some debt, an audit of the National Bank, and other reforms before renewing assistance.

The audit revealed the National Bank lent over \$1 billion to investors with close government ties, of which nearly \$600 million was never repaid. Still, in May the IMF voted to lend a further \$116 million to Tajikistan to help it through the next three years; the United States was the only IMF member to vote against this, which infuriated the Tajik government. The IMF has disbursed the first \$40 million. Before it releases the next tranche of \$30 million, the IMF must determine that the Tajik Government is making progress. One benchmark is a major reorganization of agriculture to move away from unprofitable cotton farming.

¶18. (C) Donors are pushing regional energy market integration and the construction of power lines that would allow Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to sell surplus summer electricity output to Afghanistan and Pakistan. A 220 kw line from Tajikistan to Afghanistan is under construction now with Asian Development Bank financing and will be finished in late 2010. However, the larger CASA-1000 power line project to connect Kyrgyzstan through Tajikistan and Afghanistan to Pakistan has been delayed because of financing problems. The Asian Development Bank has preferred in the near term to support poverty reduction projects; this has sat ill with the Tajiks, as they have noticed that at the same time the ADB has funded construction of the railroad extension from Termez to Mazar e Sharif, further cementing Uzbekistan's grip on NDN traffic.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

¶19. (C) Tajikistan made some progress in fighting Trafficking in Persons (TIP) during the past year, including punishing some local officials for forcing students to pick cotton, and increasing trafficking convictions. It made no progress on protecting victims or investigating abuse of victims by officials. Tajikistan barely escaped a downgrade to Tier 3, and we are now discussing an action plan to improve Tajikistan's anti-TIP efforts with the government. This year the Tajiks insist that no students will be drafted to pick cotton, but this may simply be the result of a relatively poor cotton crop due to

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heavy spring rains.

¶20. (C) U.S. assistance to Tajikistan stands to grow significantly to an expected \$58 million in FY 2010, ramping up from \$30 million in FY2009. The major part of new money will go to agriculture, trade, and private sector initiatives to compensate for the loss of the much needed food security programs. Until FY 2008 Tajikistan had a multi-year food aid program that showed significant results reducing food insecurity in some of Tajikistan's most at-risk regions. New programs also will strengthen the capacity of communities to provide essential services such as increased access to drinking water, while other efforts will address chronic energy shortages by building a regional energy market and helping the central Asian states to address water and power issues.

¶21. (C) Health and education deficiencies are so acute they imperil our progress in other areas. Our programs are working to improve health policies, systems and services, teacher training, education finance, national curriculum, student performance assessment, and school governance.

TALKING POINTS FOR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT RAHMON

¶22. (SBU) Following are suggested talking points for your meetings with President Rahmon and other officials:

-- Afghanistan: We are encouraged by Tajikistan's initial steps to train Afghan border guards and counter-narcotic agents at the U.S.-built training center in Khorog. We invite Tajikistan to take on more robust training efforts with Afghanistan. What is Tajikistan's view of the proposed training program? Have there been obstacles or opportunities in the planning to train with Afghanistan?

-- Russia: Are relations with Russia improving since the recent meeting with President Medvedev? What new role is Russia trying to play in Central Asia's security?

-- Human Rights, Political Reforms: Maintaining space for political and religious expression is vital to internal stability. We are concerned that your new law on religion is being used to persecute small religious groups and will alienate religious adherents. We and OSCE are also concerned that the upcoming February 2010 parliamentary elections will not give the people an opportunity to express their political choices. You should consider amending the religion law and promptly passing electoral legislation recommended by the OSCE. We are discussing with your government an action plan to better fight trafficking in persons; lack of progress in this area could interfere with our assistance.

-- Economic Reform: Since my last visit, I know that you have accomplished much: you have launched a program for 200 Days of Reform to improve the business environment, with Tajikistan recognized by the World Bank Doing Business Report as one of the world's top ten reformers over the last year; advanced preparations for eventual WTO

accession; and resolved to forgive cotton debt and to reform the agricultural sector. These are great steps for Tajikistan's stability and prosperity. I urge you to continue your reforms, in particular by giving farmers new freedoms to expand and diversify their businesses, reducing dependence on cotton and offering new paths out of poverty.

GROSS